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Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform

Senator André Jacque

January 26, 2022

Chairman Sortwell and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as the author in support of Assembly Bill 897, the Human Trafficking Prevention Act.

Human trafficking is a significant concern in Wisconsin, with reports in all 72 counties and corridors crisscrossing our state. Milwaukee has been dubbed the “Sex Trafficking Capital of the Midwest” by law enforcement for several years. Victims of human trafficking, especially women, are often forced into sexual servitude, which may involve prostitution under the guise of an escort service or working in a strip club. Pimps then traffic these individuals by going around the state or across state lines from one establishment to another. Traffickers capitalize on the high demand for these services, the cash nature of the business, and the anonymity of the participants.

This exact problem happened in a Dodge County strip club. Pimps were trafficking girls to a strip club and forcing them to perform sex acts in private rooms. The strip club’s owners made these private rooms accessible to pimps knowing they were used for unlawful prostitution activity.

Assembly Bill 897 will protect victims of sex trafficking by prohibiting adult-entertainment establishments from being owned or operated by a person who has been convicted of certain human trafficking and sex offenses, or who has been an owner or operator of an adult-entertainment establishment that was declared a public nuisance or that knowingly employed a victim of a human trafficking offense. The bill also prohibits adult-entertainment establishments from having employees under the age of 18, or employees who have been the victim of certain sex or human trafficking offenses.

In addition, the bill prohibits adult-entertainment establishments from knowingly allowing a violation of the Uniform Controlled Substances Act or certain obscenity laws on the premises of the adult-entertainment establishment and requires adult-entertainment establishments to post a human trafficking poster created by the Department of Justice in a prominent location for employees to view. Adult-entertainment establishments would be required to furnish a list of the adult-entertainment establishment's employees, operators, and owners to local law enforcement officials upon request. Adult-entertainment establishments that violate the requirements or prohibitions of the bill would be subject to a forfeiture for each day the adult-entertainment establishment is in violation.

These changes have been suggested by investigators, prosecutors, and victims’ support and advocacy groups as a means to address the connection between adult-entertainment establishments and human trafficking. ***This proposal is formally supported by the Badger Sheriffs Association, the Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association, and the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association.***

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 897.



CHUCK WICHGERS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 83rd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform

January 26, 2022

Assembly Bill 897

State Representative Chuck Wichgers, 83rd Assembly District

Chairman Sortwell and Committee Members,

Thank you for hearing my testimony today on Assembly Bill 897, the Human Trafficking Prevention Act, relating to requirements for adult-entertainment establishments.

Human trafficking is the use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person into either commercial sex or labor. It is a crime against the inherent dignity of a person and occurs right here in Wisconsin. The average age of a girl or a boy who is coerced into commercial sexual exploitation is 12 to 14 years old. The City of Milwaukee is a major hub of human trafficking, however, the problem also hits the rural communities across our state.

This legislation will create requirements and prohibitions for adult-entertainment establishments – which are easy venues for illegal activity due to the lack of strong barriers to sex trafficking.

The bill will prohibit anyone who has been convicted of certain offenses, such as prostitution, a sex offense against a child or human trafficking, from owning or operating an adult-entertainment establishment. Additionally, a person who has been an owner or operator of an adult-entertainment establishment that was declared a public nuisance or who knowingly employed a victim of human trafficking would likewise be prohibited from owning or operating an adult-entertainment establishment.

The bill prohibits adult-entertainment establishments from allowing a violation of the Uniform Controlled Substances Act or certain obscenity laws. It requires these establishments to post a human-trafficking poster created by the Department of Justice in a prominent location for employees to view and to furnish a list of the business' employees, operators, and owners to local law enforcement officials upon request.

Violations of these requirements and prohibitions are subject to a \$10,000 forfeiture for each day the business is in violation of one of these requirements or prohibitions.

Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer any questions.